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ACTION INR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	DODE-00	WHA-00	DS-00	UTED-00
	VC-00	TEDE-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	ACE-00	TEST-00
	DSCC-00	DRL-02	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/003W		
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R 272018Z FEB 02
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4897
INFO CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY QUITO
USINT HAVANA

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INR FOR COZART
NSC FOR AMBASSADOR MAISTO
USCINCSO FOR POLAD

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, VE
SUBJ: "CHAVEZ GET OUT! AND FIX THIS LAW, TOO!"

REF: A) CARACAS 0408

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: ON FEBRUARY 27 THOUSANDS OF MEMBERS OF THE CONFEDERATION OF VENEZUELAN WORKERS (CTV) MARCHED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, OSTENSIBLY TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT STATUTORY LAW, BUT IN REALITY TO DEMAND CHAVEZ'S OUSTER. MEANWHILE, CHAVEZ'S SUPPORTERS TREKKED ACROSS TOWN TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT AND TO COMMEMORATE THE THIRTEEN ANNIVERSARY OF THE CARACAZO, WHICH CHAVEZ SEES AS SORT OF THE "BOSTON TEA PARTY" OF HIS "REVOLUTION." THE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
DATE/CASE ID: 12 APR 2005 200400109

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MARCHES NEVER CROSSED PATHS AND NO VIOLENCE HAS BEEN REPORTED. THE CHAVISTAS MAY BE TRYING TO BACK OFF THE CTV BY MAKING A CONCESSION ON THE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT LAW, BUT IT'S TOO LATE; A NATIONAL WORK STOPPAGE IS SET FOR MARCH 18. END SUMMARY.

DUELING MARCHES, AGAIN

2. (U) ON FEBRUARY 27 THOUSANDS OF MEMBERS OF THE CONFEDERATION OF VENEZUELAN WORKERS (CTV) (20 BLOCKS LONG ACCORDING TO GLOBOVISION) MARCHED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, OSTENSIBLY TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT STATUTORY LAW (REFTEL), BUT IN REALITY TO DEMAND CHAVEZ'S OUSTER. ARRIVING AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CTV PRESIDENT CARLOS ORTEGA WAS CORDIALLY GREETED BY ASSEMBLY VICE

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PRESIDENT RAFAEL SIMON JIMENEZ OF THE PRO-CHAVEZ MAS FACTION, WHO HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE WITH HIM AND OTHER LABOR LEADERS. THE BASIS FOR THIS CONGENIALITY WAS THAT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAD JUST DECIDED THE DAY BEFORE TO DELAY THE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT LAW--ONE OF THE NOTORIOUS 49 LAWS PASSED UNDER CHAVEZ'S ENABLING LAW LAST YEAR--FROM GOING INTO EFFECT FOR SIX MONTHS SO THAT LAWMAKERS COULD DEBATE SOME CHANGES. EVEN ONE OF CHAVEZ'S LABOR LEADERS ADMITTED PUBLICLY THAT THIS LAW, WHICH EVEN SETS TERMS FOR FIRING PREGNANT WORKERS, HAS SOME "RATHER NEGATIVE ASPECTS."

3. (U) MEANWHILE, CHAVEZ'S SUPPORTERS TREKKED ACROSS TOWN TO MIRAFLORES PALACE TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT AND TO COMMEMORATE THE THIRTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CARACAZO, WHICH CHAVEZ SEES AS SORT OF THE "BOSTON TEA PARTY" OF HIS "REVOLUTION." AT LEAST JUDGING FROM TV CAMERA SHOTS, THIS MARCH DIDN'T APPEAR QUITE AS WELL ATTENDED AS THE CTV MARCH. AMONG OTHER PRO-CHAVEZ LEADERS, REPORTERS INTERVIEWED PATRIA PARA TODOS HEAD JOSE ALBORNOZ, WHO COMPLAINED THAT MIRANDA STATE GOVERNOR ENRIQUE MENDOZA HAD HAD BUSES OF CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS DETAINED TO PREVENT THEIR ATTENDING THE MARCH, AND LIBERTADOR MAYOR FREDDY BERNAL, WHO, WITHOUT A TRACE OF IRONY, ACCUSED THE CTV OF THREATENING PUBLIC ORDER. BUT AS USUAL THE TWO COMPETING MARCHES NEVER CROSSED PATHS AND NO VIOLENT INCIDENTS HAVE BEEN REPORTED. AT MIRAFLORES DEFENSE MINISTER JOSE VICENTE RANGEL ADDRESSED THE CHAVEZ FAITHFUL AND SAID THAT A MILITARY COUP HAS "NO SUPPORT IN THE MILITARY, NO SUPPORT IN THE PEOPLE, AND NO SUPPORT IN THE UNITED STATES."

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COMMENT: CAN'T WE STILL WORK THINGS OUT?

4. (SBU) THE CHAVISTAS ARE LOSING GROUND, AND THEY KNOW IT. THE DEFENSIVE COMMENTS MADE BY ALBORNOZ AND BERNAL ARE OF THE SORT OPPOSITION LEADERS MADE LAST NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER WHEN THEY WERE ONLY JUST BEGINNING TO COMPETE IN STREET DEMONSTRATIONS. THE DECISION TO REVIEW THE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT LAW, APPARENTLY BACKED BY THE CHAVISTAS, WAS VIRTUALLY UNTHINKABLE EVEN A MONTH AGO, WHEN CHAVEZ MADE IT CLEAR HE HAD NO INTENTION OF BACKING DOWN ON THE ENABLING LAW PACKAGE. BUT NOW A STRATEGY OF SENSIBLE HORSE-TRADING COMES TOO LATE TO MOLLIFY THE OPPOSITION. THE CTV, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS JUST ANNOUNCED IT WILL CALL A 24-HOUR NATIONAL WORK STOPPAGE FOR MARCH 18. WITH EVERY ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATION, WHATEVER ITS STATED THEME, WORKING UNDER THE UNOFFICIAL MOTTO "CHAVEZ GET OUT," IT WILL BE ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO DEMOBILIZE NOW.

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